

Wabash Reflections

May 2004

A newsletter brought to you by the Wabash River Heritage Corridor Commission (WRHCC). The Wabash River Heritage Corridor Commission, representing the Wabash River Heritage Corridor, shall protect and enhance the natural, cultural, historical, and recreational resources and encourage sustainable development of the corridor.

- ❖ The Lyles Station Story
- ❖ The Lyles Consolidated School Experience
- ❖ The Wetland Reserve Program
- ❖ New Harmony Riverfront and Greenway Program
- ❖ Governor Kernan Presents Highest Hoosier Award to Dan McCain

The Lyles Station Story **Submitted by Mary Madison**

The legacy of Lyles Station, Indiana, a small community located 4.5 miles west of Princeton, Indiana, began when brothers Joshua and Sanford Lyles, freed slaves from Tennessee, migrated north and purchased land near the convergence of the Wabash, Patoka, and White Rivers in the late 1850's. After the Civil War, Joshua Lyles returned to Tennessee a successful farmer and urged family and friends to join him in Indiana. On September 16, 1870, Joshua Lyles donated six acres of his land to the Airline Railroad, which maintained a station in Lyles Station for passenger and mail service until the 1950's. In 1886, the settlement was officially named Lyles Station in honor of Joshua Lyles. That same year, William H. Roundtree successfully petitioned the federal government for a post office in Lyles Station and became the first black postmaster north of the Mason-Dixon Line.

The town flourished during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, developing into a self-sustaining community of approximately 800 residents. At its peak (1880-1913), Lyles Station consisted of fifty-five homes, a post office, a railroad station, an elementary school, two churches, two general stores, and a lumber mill. The town even had its own military band. However, the 1913 flood of the Patoka and Wabash Rivers left much of the area under water, marking the start of the settlement's decline. With their homes, farms, and businesses decimated, many residents relocated north to cities such as Terre Haute and Indianapolis where steel mills and other industries were seeking workers.

Today, only a few homes remain in the community of Lyles Station but nearly half of the residents are descendants of the original black settlers. Along with the scattered houses, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, a grain elevator, and the schoolhouse are all that stand as a physical reminder of the once-thriving settlement of Lyles Station, Indiana.

However, the spirit of freedom and perseverance which made the town prosper is still very much alive in the hearts and minds of those individuals who have worked to restore the Lyles Consolidated School building. Groundbreaking on the renovation project was held in June of 2002 and in June of 2003, the dreams of preserving the Lyles Station legacy were realized with the opening of the restored Lyles Consolidated School.

The Lyles Consolidated School Experience

A multi-faceted experience awaits visitors of all ages at The Lyles Consolidated School. Visiting students have the opportunity to experience a school day as it would have been during the early 1900's in the Heritage Classroom. African American history comes alive in the museum where artifacts and memorabilia from the Lyles Station settlement are on display. Guests will find that perfect memento of their visit in the gift shop. Guided tours are available free of charge to the public on Saturdays from 1:00-4:00 p.m. or by appointment. Advance reservations are required for groups of 6 or more.

The Wetlands Reserve Program Submitted by Keith Ruble

For a number of years, and especially after last summer's floods, many Wabash River landowners have signed or are in the process of volunteering their property to be put in the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP).

The WRP is the United States premier wetlands' restoration program. The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) manages the program and provides financial and technical service to landowners who participate in WRP.

Landowners enrolling their land in this program must sign a permanent easement. After their land is appraised, owners receive the agricultural land value of their property. The USDA also provides 100% of the expense to restore the farmland back to trees or prairie. Ownership of the property is retained by the landowner who still has the right to hunt, fish, trap, or use it for other types of recreational use.

Along the Wabash River thousands of acres are being put in the WRP Program. In Illinois, Clark, Crawford, Gallatin, Lawrence, Wabash and White Counties have been major contributors to this program. In Clark County alone, 2,500 acres of former Wabash River flood plain have been put in WRP.

In Indiana, in addition to the WRP acreage, the following table includes the Flood Plain Easement Program, which is very similar to WRP:

County	# of Landowners	Acres
Posey	7	653
Gibson	6	1376
Sullivan	15	2072
Vigo	7	1315
Vermillion	12	1668

Parke	3	308
Warren	3	263
Tippecanoe	2	109
Adams	1	82

7,846 total acres

The above includes land immediately adjacent to the river and whose landowners have an easement recorded or an imminent recording.

When you look at the mission statement of the Wabash River Heritage Corridor Commission about preserving, restoring and enhancing the Wabash River, the commission has a real partner with WRP in achieving its goals. As a commission member, I feel that in terms of preservation and acquisition, the WRP program can play an important role in helping the WRHCC. We need to study ways to work together for the betterment of the Wabash River.

New Harmony Riverfront and Greenway Program Submitted by David Rice

New Harmony, a historic village of some 870 people, is situated on a low terrace above the Wabash floodplain. Although bounded on the north and west by the River, for the most part, the Wabash has not been either a visible or a useable resource for New Harmony since steamboat traffic ceased in the last part of the nineteenth century. The presence of this low terrace between the Wabash River Floodplain and the upland to the south and east likely governed the Harmonists' selection of this feature for construction of their village of "New Harmony." The broad expanse of land slightly above the highest floods on the Wabash gave them easy access to this, the principal avenue of commerce.

New Harmony, was a planned community laid out by the Harmonists under George Rapp in 1814. The town site was originally bounded by North Street, East Street, South Street, and West Street with access to the River being at the northwest corner of the village. In 1965 the United States Department of Interior National Park Service designated New Harmony a National Historic Landmark under the provisions of the Historic Sites Act of August 21, 1935. The commemorating plaque is located at Church and Main Streets and states: "This site possesses exceptional value in commemorating and illustrating the history of the United States.

In 1999, the American Institute of Certified Planners designated New Harmony (1814-1827) as a NATIONAL PLANNING LANDMARK with the commemorative plaque reading: "George Rapp's New Harmony was surveyed on August 8, 1814. Within ten years, the Harmonist created a center of commerce and religious communal living in the frontier. Social theorist Robert Owen purchased the town in 1825, and together with his partner William Maclure made New Harmony a pioneering secular communitarian settlement and the model for nine other American Owenite Communities established between 1825 and 1843."

The New Harmony Riverfront and Greenway Project is an effort to develop and integrate the riparian areas and adjacent upland areas to enrich, preserve, and enhance the health, safety, and quality of life of the greater New Harmony areas. The project, which is being designed to include a riverfront pathway for bicycles, pedestrians, horses, golf carts, and carriages in the floodplain will connect with a pathway along the forested slopes that bound the town on the south and that will encircle the town via a north-south pathway along Murphy Run near the eastern margin of the village.

The terrace is separated from the Wabash River along its northern and western margin by a thin sliver of floodplain that commonly floods during late winter and early spring. An Army Corps of Engineers and town of New Harmony Erosion Control Project extends for more than a mile along the east bank of the river north of New Harmony. The Riverfront Trails Project will use the east-west portion of this feature which parallels North Street, access the historic village, and its sites via the original North and Church Street corridors, and follow the Wabash River margin to the Athenaeum. Historic New Harmony tours of the historic village begin at this striking service center, rest spot, and welcoming place.

South of the Riverfront Pathway and east of North Main Street Red Geranium Enterprises has developed foot paths through an area of ponds and woods with the focus being on Tillich Garden, named after the renowned German Theologian, Paul Tillich. Nearby, the Cathedral Labyrinth, Roofless Church, and gardens along North Street are open to tourists. Near West Street the Harmonist Cemetery, adjacent orchard, and remnant of the Harmonist "ropewalk" are quiet areas open to the public.

Sculpture is an important element of New Harmony's charm with fountains highlighting small parks, and gardens. Church Park, on the site of one of the two original Harmonist churches, embraces the Gummer Fountain which is dedicated to Kenneth D. Owen with other notable examples of this art form being in Carol's Garden, at the Cathedral Labyrinth, on the terrace west of the Red Geranium restaurant, and in the small garden in the southeast corner of the Roofless Church. Near the northeastern margin of the village the grounds of the Barn Abbey overlook the Wabash floodplain and are home to a striking sculpture known to some as the "Madonna of the Wabash."

The Audubon Society is developing plans to enhance bird habitat with nesting places and will establish observation spots along the Trail. Moreover, the Bike Trail Group of Harmonie Associates, a local non-profit group is working to develop a connecting bike trail from South Main Street to the Indiana 69 bike path and Harmonie State Park.

Dr. David Rice is President emeritus of the University of Southern Indiana.

Governor Kernan Presents Highest Hoosier Award to Dan McCain

Submitted by Tom Castaldi

Acknowledging his work to develop the Historic Trails, Canal Park and the Wabash & Erie Canal Conference & Interpretative Center in Delphi, Indiana, State Representative Rich McClain presented a Sagamore of the Wabash award to Mr. Daniel McCain in behalf of

Governor Joseph E. Kernan. During the April 20, 2004, annual meeting of the Carroll County Wabash & Erie Canal, Inc., Representative McClain read a letter from the governor commending McCain's accomplishments.

"I am honored to appoint you a Sagamore of the Wabash and to express the appreciation of all Hoosiers for your commitment to making Indiana a better place to live and raise a family. The term "Sagamore of the Wabash" was used by northeastern United States Native Americans to describe a lesser chief or other great person among the tribe to whom the chief would look for wisdom and advice. You, Dan, certainly fit that description. You have distinguished yourself by your humanity in living, your loyalty in friendship, your wisdom in council and your inspiration in leadership."

Mr. McCain has served as Carroll County Wabash & Erie Canal Inc., board president for three years, and an office his mother the late Roseland McCain pioneered when she was elected its founding president. He was instrumental in the development of the Historic Trails, Canal Park and Wabash & Erie Canal Conference & Interpretive Center. Mr. McCain worked for over 17 years to develop the Canal Center and has served as the president of the Canal Interpretive Center Commission, comprised of representatives from the canal corporation, City Parks Board and the City of Delphi.

Recently, Mr. McCain was honored when the Delphi Chamber of Commerce bestowed upon him its Samuel Milroy Award in recognition of his efforts to promote the economical and social well being of the town. Mr. McCain has or is serving in leadership roles for several non-profit organizations including: Banks of the Wabash, Wabash River Heritage Corridor, Canal Society of Indiana, Museum at Prophetstown, American Canal Society, the Indiana State Museum Foundation, as well as the Carroll County Heritage Tourism and the Carroll County Historic Bridges groups.

A graduate of Purdue University, Mr. McCain is retired after 34 years with the USDA Soil Conservation Service. In 1998, McCain was named the *Progressive Farmer Magazine's* "Man of the Year in Service to Indiana Agriculture".